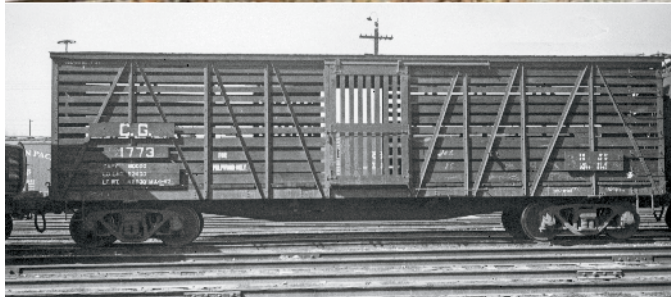


# More alternative uses of freight cars



These two photos show more alternative uses for freight cars. The model photo above shows a narrow gauge SP stock car during its short-lived career as a coke car, and the C of G stock car is labeled FOR PULPWOOD ONLY. Model photo: Steve Bradley; C of G: Tom Holley

In the October 2020 “Trains of Thought,” I wrote about alternative uses of freight cars. Some examples were bricks carried in stock cars and ventilated boxcars; grain, flour, and coke in stock cars that were lined with plywood; and beet pulp, cement, lumber, clay, and railroad ties in ventilated boxcars.

The Summer 2020 issue of *Nickel Plate Road Magazine*, the quarterly publication of the NKP Historical & Technical Society ([nkphts.org](http://nkphts.org)), carried an article that featured photos from the Bloomington, Ill., *Pantagraph*. They showed the NKP’s short 32-foot covered hoppers, normally used for cement loading, being topped off with grain during our frantic post-World War II efforts to help feed a starving Europe. Even tarp-covered open hoppers were employed in grain-carrying duty. In normal times, grain was shipped in 40-foot boxcars until the 1960s.

The column also generated a lot of other examples of alternative car usages. Tom Holley noted that “the ‘Y’all’ roads had large fleets of ventilated boxes and, in the off season, used them as regular boxcars. When the paper mill/pulpwood boom took off after WWII, some roads (Southern and Central of Georgia come to mind) rebuilt ventilated boxes into pulpwood racks. On some of the Central’s old rebuilt cars, the spaces where the vents had been were still visible on the wood-rack ends.

“Also during the pulpwood boom,” Tom added, “railroads loaded pulpwood into anything they could haul it in. I’m including a photo of a CofG stock car stenciled FOR PULPWOOD ONLY. Pulpwood was also loaded in boxcars; CofG and Savannah & Atlanta employee timetables both listed weights for pulpwood in boxcars and pulpwood on wood racks to aid the conductor in scaling

his train. Labor was cheaper then – and can you imagine loading or unloading pulpwood from a boxcar in August in, say, Glenwood, Alabama?”

“I personally saw light-bulbs loaded in empty reefers heading back to California from Ohio,” Larry DeYoung recalls. “Clean lading going into clean-lading cars. That was not much of a test for the suspensions on those cars!”

Ken Bolt recalls reading about reefers being used to haul cement during the off-season. The article included a photo of a string of reefers lined up for loading at a cement plant.

Well-known *Model Railroader* author Mont Switzer remembers seeing a Monon open hopper in Indianapolis

with shelled corn. “Upon closer investigation, I found it had a plastic liner. This was around 1969, and there was a boxcar shortage during the harvest.”

Even the narrow gauge railroads got into the act. “Your ‘Trains of Thought’ comments made me think about the Southern Pacific, and more specifically the SP Narrow Gauge,” Steve Bradley told me. “It seems this railroad (and probably all railroads) were always looking to save money wherever they could, reusing their car inventory as needed. Many cars started out as flatcars and became something quite different for most of their lives. I am thinking of the open-top stock cars of the narrow gauge line that became coke cars, with awning-type side doors and sloped floors for ease of unloading. However, this appears not to have lasted long, as the floors were flattened, and the cars were used for most of their lives as livestock transport (sheep) in seasonal moves.

“This was true of many other SP type cars as well,” Steve added. “Flatcars became gondolas, which became side-discharge gondolas, boxcars became cabooses – whatever it took to get the job done!”

**Creativity has always been** a key part of any industrial endeavor, railroading included. We might as well borrow some of that creativity and apply it to our miniature railroads. **MR**

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—TONY